



## *“The Crowning Glory”: Boston Cream Pie*

Two layers of sponge cake held together by vanilla pastry cream and topped with fudge frosting. People often wonder about the name of this dessert that more closely resembles a cake. Some have speculated that in early America, pie plates were more common than cake pans, and therefore were more likely to be used. Others suggest the line between “cake” and “pie” was very fine, leading to a class of desserts called



*John F. Kennedy celebrates his 44th birthday.  
Abbie Rowe/Whitehouse, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.*

pudding-cake pies. Whatever the origins, Boston Cream Pie as we know it today was invented by pastry chef Sanzian in 1856 at the Omni Parker Hotel in Boston. In 1996, Boston Cream Pie became the official state dessert of Massachusetts.

The Omni Parker House held special meaning for the Kennedy family. The hotel was a favorite of Mrs. Kennedy’s father, Boston Mayor John “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald (1906-1907; 1910-1913), for political meetings and family gatherings, and was adopted in turn by successive generations. It is said that at age 6 John F. Kennedy gave his first speech at a party for his grandfather there, and later went on to launch his bid for Congress there some 23 years later. It seems fitting, then, that this was the favorite dessert of one of Massachusetts’ most prominent families: the Kennedys.

Rose Kennedy, the president’s mother, remembers that Boston Cream Pie was always “the climactic display” to a meal or outing. The treat often played a prominent role on train trips. Mrs. Kennedy remembers using food as a way to pass the time during these long journeys. Having her children slowly eat through a number of courses built up anticipation for the final course of Boston Cream Pie, “the crowning glory and favorite of all.” Boston Cream Pie was easy to transport, and unlike other desserts, “survived jostling and never ended in a chocolate mess” when the family arrived for a day at the beach. When Joseph Kennedy Sr. became the ambassador to England in 1938, the family moved to London. Among the three American staff members she brought with her, Mrs. Kennedy makes special note of Margaret Ambrose, “who kept the family supplied with creamed chicken, strawberry shortcake, and Boston Cream Pie.” In the years to come, Mrs. Kennedy served the treat to her grandchildren when they visited, so that her children “associated it with good times together, and now so does the next generation.” In many ways, Boston Cream Pie came to represent something that was both American and a reminder of special family events and outings.

We invite you to share in this Kennedy family favorite as we celebrate the birth of the nation’s 35th President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Quotations taken from *Times to Remember*, the 1974 memoir of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy.

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